

Do We Need A Police-Community Advisory Board?

In the attitude survey conducted by Market Planning Cooperation for the Commission on Group Relations in Newark the opinions and feelings of people were carefully documented in a number of crucial areas. In a section of the survey people were queried as to their feelings and attitudes about inter-group tension in our City and about police community relations.

In June 1959, the Mayor's Commission on Group Relations published "Newark A City In Transition". On page 29 of Volume III the following quotation appears: "With regard to the question of whether racial groups are treated unfairly in Newark, about half the Negroes believe that members of their race are not always treated fairly in Newark. This is a larger proportion than thought that there was actual racial tension. This presents a situation in which more Negroes believe that they are treated unfairly than believe that such unfair treatment translates into disharmony between the races. If, as this seems to indicate, Negroes do not perceive their difficulties as a people in Newark in terms of racial tension, another encouraging sign for the continuance of good race relations may be said to exist".

In the four years since this survey was published, Newark has not had one serious incident of inter-racial strife. One of the major functions of the Newark Human Rights Commission is to help maintain this good record.

As Executive Director of this agency it is my strong personal feeling that a Police-Community Advisory Board can do far more good than evil. The leadership of the Negro community in our City is consolidated in its belief that a Police Advisory Board is necessary.

Back in 1958 there was no organized feeling in favor of such a Board. Whether or not this change in Negro community attitudes is based upon fact or feeling is a relatively unimportant issue. The fact is that a group of leaders has formed to speak in behalf of the Negro population which believes "that members of their race are not always treated fairly in Newark".

In view of these developments and considering the fact that Police Advisory Boards work only in the interests of objectivity and fairness to all concerned, I believe the inception of such a citizens group in Newark can become a clearing house of information which can also clear the air of charges and counter-charges regardless of the sources of the complaints, police or citizen.

Six months ago when this question was first brought to the attention of the Mayor, the Commission on Group Relations endorsed the concept of a Newark Police Advisory Board. At the next meeting of our agency this discussion will be reopened to enable the three new Addonizio appointments to the board to express their points of view and determine whether or not the entire commission is still in favor of supporting such a community-wide conciliatory body.

Although I have no right to pre-judge this question, I know that at least two of the three new members are for a Police Advisory Board, which indicates that the Commission is not likely to alter its past positive position.

If a majority of any group believes it is being mistreated, the least a progressive community can do is to find ways and means of ameliorating the past problems. If the new technique does not work, then is the time to think of other ways of answering the felt needs of the people.

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